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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CANADA: PUBLIC SAFETY MINISTER SPEAKS OUT ON TERRORIST THREAT

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On July 11 Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan gave a speech that the Ottawa Citizen described as one of the most forceful ever by a Canadian minister on terrorism. She stated "we have perhaps for too long thought that these were things that happened somewhere else. But Canadians are not immune to what we see happen in London, Madrid, 9/11." She suggested that Canadians are not as psychologically prepared for a terrorist attack as they ought to be. McLellan's comments were a notable shift from the post-9/11 tradition of playing down the terrorist threat to Canada. Her address and statements match the current trend among opinion leaders of demonstrating a remarkable amount of empathy for the United Kingdom, and growing awareness that Canada could very well be the next victim of an attack. This sense of vulnerability and urgency does not appear to resonate with the average Canadian, however, who continues to evince a sense of aloofness from terrorist attacks based on the popular image of Canada's fair and generous position in the world. END SUMMARY

CANADA THE VULNERABLE

¶2. (SBU) In a speech delivered to the 15th World Conference on Disaster Management July 11, Anne McLellan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, spoke frankly about Canada's vulnerability in the wake of the London bombings. McLellan combined clear statements about the current threat to Canada with a list of what Canada has been doing to meet the threat, and suggested where there is more work to be done.

MEETING THE THREAT

¶3. (U) Since 9/11, McLellan said, Canada has spent CN\$9 billion in public safety initiatives. She ticked off a long list of things Canada has done to improve its public safety posture since 9/11 and SARS:

-- Intelligence-sharing network put in place after the Madrid bombings
-- Creation of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (PSEPC) in December 2003 (the equivalent of DHS)
-- Creation of Public Health Agency of Canada (modeled after CDC)
-- Promulgation of Government's National Security Policy
-- Development of Cabinet Committee on Security, Public Health, and Emergencies to coordinate cabinet level decisions
-- Development of exercises within Canada and with international partners
-- Establishment of Government Operations Center (under PSEPC, a 24/7 facility to monitor and respond to crisis), and National Emergency Response System activated June 30 to ensure a more harmonious response by federal agencies.

¶4. (U) McLellan also spoke of a number of initiatives that are ongoing, stating that "the way Canada dealt with Emergency Management in the past is not good enough for the present." She also suggested that Canadians need to "expand our idea of community and explore the wider implications of emergencies." She suggested more work on the following:

-- Co-locating regional emergency management offices with those of the provinces and municipalities (already completed in NS, PEI and the NW Territories, soon in Ottawa).
-- Finalization of Critical Infrastructure Protection strategy, with timelines for implementation.
-- Establishment of a National Task Force on Cyber Security to complement the Cyber Incident Response Center in the ops center.
-- Ongoing effort to respond to emergencies in an integrated manner, developing new methods for coordinating between provinces, communities, and the territories, and between nations.
-- Continuation of support for first responders.

¶5. (U) McLellan said that Canada's Emergency Preparedness System worked as expected when activated following the London bombings, but noted the need for closer collaboration between Canada's mass transit systems, and suggested the need to examine training systems for transit security officials.

16. (SBU) Canadian officials have indicated a clear understanding that a nation's psychological preparation is important to weathering and recovering from an attack, and McLellan pointed out in her speech that she does not believe that "Canadians are as psychologically prepared for a terrorist attack as I think probably we all should be." For too long, McLellan said, Canadians thought "that these were things that happened somewhere else. But Canadians are not immune to what we see happened in London, Madrid, 9/11. We are not immune to that kind of terrorist violence."

17. (SBU) At the same time, McLellan went out of her way to point out that there are no known imminent threats. She said in her speech that "there is no specific threat against Canada at this time," and remarked to the press that "there is no necessity for Canadians to be in any way unusually alarmed." The latter was likely a response to comments from the retiring head of the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service, Ward Elcock, who publicly suggested it was now a matter of if, not when, Canada will be attacked.

SOLIDARITY WITH BRITISH COUSINS

18. (SBU) McLellan's comments underscore the resonance which the London bombings has here, something which was not true of New York, Madrid or Bali (all of which garnered considerable sympathy, but not this kind of almost familial connection). Editorial and Opinion comment fell just short of a rallying call-to-arms, it was completely supportive of Canada's UK cousins and almost jingoistic in its accolades for British resolve and grit in the midst of attack. Compliments on the reaction to the attacks praised post 9-11 counter-terrorism and disaster relief development, while also suggesting it was all a natural extension of the British character. Some comment went so far as to dismiss the scale of the attack, suggesting that terrorists would have to put forward a markedly greater effort to truly rattle the Brits. Frequent references were made to the Blitz of World War Two and IRA campaigns against England as examples of how Britain has been properly challenged in the past and has weathered the storm.

IS CANADA NEXT?

19. (SBU) Apart from the suggested connection between Canada and the UK, another clear focus in the coverage of the attacks is "could it happen here?" This includes coverage beyond McLellan's call for Canadians to be psychologically prepared. With a few exceptions the media suggests the answer is yes. Much attention is dedicated to a list of targets held by Al-Qaeda that includes Canada. Government of Canada officials are openly stating that Canada is on a target list of some kind, but are quick to point out there have been no specific threats or information to suggest an attack is imminent. Media presentation of Canada being on a list does not completely stand up to examination, but the perception continues and is supported by comments such as McLellan's. (Comment: Confusion does exist because different media outlets are clearly referring to different lists, some referencing statements made by Osama Bin Laden, others noting captured Al-Qaeda operatives. As an example of the confusion, CBC coverage presented a report on the morning of the bombing that played a bin Laden recording listing the U.S., Australia, the U.K., France, Spain and Canada. The graphic included the French flag with all the others, and the anchor indicated that Canada was the only country left to be hit without mentioning France. End Comment)

10. (SBU) Some experts have tried to temper the idea of Canada as next-on-the-list by saying out that while Canada is still a target, it has, in fact, always been a target and the attacks on London do not demonstrate an increased risk for this country. The few voices that dismiss the threat to Canada suggest that no city in Canada, not even Toronto, holds a high enough profile to be worth the effort. Secondly, they state that any attack on Canadian soil would result in immediate and drastic changes on the border with the United States that would make already difficult access to the United States even more challenging. These points of view appear, however, to accept a networked Al-Qaeda, not the disorganized Al-Qaeda movement that is being described with growing frequency.

11. (SBU) COMMENT: Despite comments from Minister McLellan and media coverage that supports her more assertive position, televised 'man-on-the-street' interviews continue to indicate that Canadians do not really believe Canada is at risk. While London may have hit the closest yet in the psyche of the Canadian people, not even this would appear to change the general perception that terrorists simply wouldn't hit a country that is so generous and fair-minded in the world. If London was an alarm clock, the snooze button here was quickly hit, and Ottawa is good for at least another thirty minutes of slumber.

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